

# Veterans' Health

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE  
FOR OHIO VETERANS

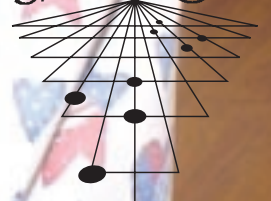
SPRING • 2003

Why nurses  
choose VA

Emergency!—Or is it?

Veterans  
receive  
Advanced  
Access

VA Healthcare  
System of Ohio





## To our readers

We are pleased to present our spring issue during National Nutrition Month—an ideal opportunity to start practicing healthier lifestyle choices. Our issue covers ways you can improve your well-being, such as controlling your weight (see below) and avoiding a trip to the emergency room (see pages 4–5).

Our article on page 3 features some of our talented nurses and why they choose VA as their career choice. We also make you aware of some VA features that benefit you, such as a TeleNurse hotline for quick, efficient feedback and our Advanced Access program that enables you to see your doctor more easily and with less wait time.

We hope you find this issue informative. Best wishes for a happy and healthy spring season!

—Clyde Parkis, Network Director



### About our mailing list

We make every effort to ensure our mailing lists are accurate. If you have questions or would like to be added to or deleted from the list, let us know. To help serve you better, we need to know your entire address. If you receive *Veterans' Health*, the easiest way is to clip the mailing panel and send it to us at:

*Veterans' Health*

VA Healthcare System of Ohio  
11500 Northlake Drive, Suite 200  
Cincinnati, OH 45249

## Control your weight

The combination of regular exercise and a well-balanced diet can improve cardiovascular health, build lean muscle, increase flexibility, reduce disease risk, lift your mood and lower your blood pressure and cholesterol, among other benefits. What a better time to make a healthy lifestyle change than March, which is National Nutrition Month.

“Studies show that many diseases—including heart disease, diabetes and even cancer—can be attributed to a poor diet and lack of exercise,” says Pat Taylor, registered dietitian, Chillicothe VA campus. “Exercising at least 20–30 minutes, three times a week, and following the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Services’ Food Pyramid can lead to a healthier lifestyle.”

Before starting an exercise program, visit your physician for a complete physical. The results can determine guidelines for your fitness and nutrition plan. **VH**

*Veterans' Health* is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 22 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through the VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

#### The Mission of the VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

COVER PHOTO: JEANETTE CRISWELL, R.N., NURSE EXECUTIVE (LEFT), WITH LINDA NTUMBA, R.N., STAFF NURSE (RIGHT), AT THE CINCINNATI CAMPUS

### *Veterans' Health* Editorial Directors

**Suzanne Tate**  
Cincinnati VA Campus

**Debbie Crabtree**  
Chillicothe VA Campus

**Debbie Page**  
VA Healthcare System of Ohio



# Why nurses choose VA

**W**hile many hospitals nationwide struggle to find and retain talented nurses, VA Healthcare System of Ohio is growing in popularity among nurses seeking a rewarding work environment. An attractive and comprehensive benefits package—which includes health insurance, vacation time and paid holidays and sick leave—is one reason why new recruits find VA appealing, but it isn't the only factor.

“Obviously, pay and benefits are important, but so is appreciation, respect and recognition,” says Linda Ntumba, a registered nurse with VA's Cincinnati campus. Ntumba joined VA in 2000 and has 23 years of nursing experience. “We work in a positive atmosphere where we are recognized for a job well done and our ideas and opinions are heard.

“Because of the environment we work in, we look forward to coming in every day,” Ntumba adds. “As a nurse who worked at other



Linda Ntumba, R.N., pursues her career at Cincinnati campus.

hospitals before coming to VA, I especially appreciate and value what we have here.”

To attract and keep qualified team members, VA Healthcare System of Ohio offers incentives such as recruitment bonuses and 12-hour shifts that allow nurses more days off. Also, at some hospitals, nurses are asked to stay home when there aren't enough patients on their wards, forcing them to take vacation leave or unpaid time. At VA, however, nurses are cross-trained to work in different medical areas, thus eliminating the need to send them home.

To find qualified nurses, VA participates in career fairs at schools and cities statewide. The key is generating awareness about the benefits of working at a VA hospital.

“VA's visibility is less obvious in larger cities where there are numerous public and private hospitals,” says Jeanette Criswell, nurse executive at VA's Cincinnati campus. “This is why we are spreading the word about how much we have to offer so even more nurses will consider VA as a career choice.” **VH**

## Protecting against smallpox

**A**lthough routine smallpox vaccinations were stopped in the early 1970s, the threat of using smallpox as a weapon against the United States does concern us.

**An advisory committee has recommended a pre-event smallpox vaccination plan. This plan will target 500,000 healthcare workers nationwide and will prepare them to care for any cases of smallpox that may occur. President Bush approved the pre-event planning and VA will be working with the Department of Health and Human Services and state and local public health departments to implement the plan.**

# Emergency!—Or is it?



## Tips for avoiding a trip to the Emergency Room

- **Don't go bust.** Make sure your halls, stairs and carpets are well lighted and trip free. Climb stairs using the handrail.
- **Get tacky.** Use traction strips in the tub and install grab bars onto the bath tile or fiberglass. Secure rugs with nonskid tape.
- **Be alarmed.** Be certain you have at least one smoke detector per floor and that the batteries are fresh. Even better: Buy additional alarms for carbon monoxide (CO) and radon.
- **Drive friendly.** Insist that everyone use seatbelts in the car, and never drink or take medicine and drive.
- **Shop smart.** Buy safely at the supermarket. Avoid dented cans, check expiration dates and don't buy dated items.
- **Handle with care.** Promptly refrigerate food as soon as you get home from the market. Make sure uncooked meats and fish don't drip juices onto other foods. Wash your hands before and after handling foods.
- **Give them a sign.** Some studies indicate that just placing burglar alarm system decals in your windows decreases the chances of break-ins by 75 percent. But ... you'll save on your homeowners' insurance if you also install the real thing.
- **Get safety in numbers.** Keep a set of emergency numbers by each phone in your home. Give a duplicate set to a trusted neighbor or relative who will notice when something doesn't seem right.

## A guide to medical call for

**W**ith good health habits and a little luck, you may never face a sudden medical crisis. But sooner or later, some of us may find ourselves involved in one. Suppose it's chest pain, stomach cramps or a nasty kitchen accident—what's the right response? Should you hit red alert or just go see your family doctor?

### Dialing for doctors

A true medical emergency is a situation that is life threatening or could cause permanent harm if not treated immediately. Every minute counts. That's the difference between cases needing instant, team-managed medical intervention and those your doctor can handle in the office.

Doctors say there are no “wrong” reasons to call 911 in a real emergency, especially if it's heart related. At such a critical time, don't drive yourself to the Emergency Room, get a taxi or have someone else drive you—it could be dangerous. Plus, you need the expertise and equipment that's on an ambulance.

Read on for various emergencies that require a 911 call. Post the list on your refrigerator or by your phone so you can refer to it in case of a medical crisis. And remember, if you are ever in doubt, play it safe and dial 911. Doing so could save a life.

### Seek emergency treatment ...

**In cases of sudden changes in mental status:**

- fainting or dizziness
- hallucinations or sudden clouding of thoughts
- suicidal or homicidal feelings

# conditions that emergency care

- excessive sleepiness, fussiness, dizziness, confusion or changes in mental abilities in babies or children

## In cases of trauma:

- wounds that don't stop bleeding after 10 to 15 minutes of pressure; wounds in which the edges gape; wounds that involve face or hands; wounds caused by a puncture; wounds in which glass, metal or other objects may have pierced the body

- problems with movement or feeling after injury

- burns on the face or genitals; burns around the whole hand; burns that feel painless or numb; burns that are white, brown, black or charred; burns that are serious in adults older than 60 or in children

- sunburn with nausea, vomiting, fever or chills

- animal or human bites
- broken bones
- spinal (back or neck) injuries
- poisoning or drug overdose

## Anytime you have these symptoms:

- new onset of difficulty breathing or shortness of breath

- chest, jaw, shoulder, arm or abdominal pain or pressure

- sudden lack of coordination, numbness, weakness or loss of balance on one or both sides of the body

- difficulty speaking or understanding simple statements

- sudden blurred or limited vision in one or both eyes **VH**



## VA offers phone service for your medical questions

**D**o you have questions about symptoms you're experiencing or medicine you're taking? If so, and your VA hospital is closed for the day, call the VA TeleNurse Program at **1-888-838-6446**.

VA TeleNurse answers medical-related and administrative inquiries. Staffed by registered nurses, the service is available from 4 p.m. to 8 a.m. on Monday through Thursday and from 4 p.m. on Friday through 8 a.m. on Monday. You can get your questions answered in the comfort of your home. Though you can't schedule an appointment, you can cancel an existing appointment or ask for a reminder of the time and date of your next one.

"We get lots of calls from people who have questions about symptoms they, or a loved one, are experiencing," says Charlene Marbury, registered nurse, who operates the program from VA's Dayton campus. "We don't diagnose, but we offer advice on what to do." **VH**





services from VA? The quality of its clinical care is one reason. Another is the system's change in focus. Formerly a network that generally treated illnesses in their later stages, VA healthcare now emphasizes early disease detection and prevention as well as health and wellness promotion.

To offer veterans better access to healthcare, VA has opened more than 400 community-based clinics in the past four years, raising the number of ambulatory care

# Veterans receive Advanced Access

**I**n rapidly increasing numbers, veterans are seeking VA healthcare. Overall, the figure has risen from 2.9 million veterans in 1995 to about 4.4 million in 2002.

## VA develops Advanced Clinic Access

Recognizing that it was taking a longer time for new veterans to get appointments with primary care providers and specialists, VA formed the Advanced Clinic Access Initiative, designed to reduce waits and delays across the entire VA healthcare system.

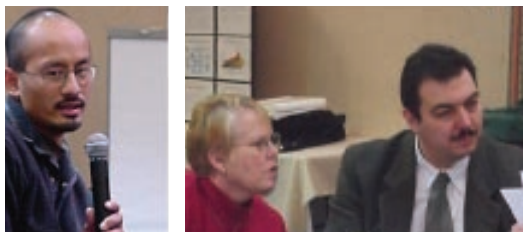
The initiative's purpose is to develop a system that can reach and maintain patient access levels and flow times that meet and even exceed the current VA performance standards—scheduling new patient appointments within 30 days, arranging appointments with a specialist within 30 days of referral and helping patients see their providers within 20 minutes of their scheduled appointments.

Why are more veterans seeking healthcare

and outpatient clinics to more than 800. Though this has allowed VA to offer healthcare services to more patients, the unprecedented demand continues to grow, prompting the creation of the Advanced Clinic Access Initiative in 2002.

In facilities across VA Healthcare System of Ohio, many veterans are already experiencing timelier access, especially in the primary care, orthopedics, urology, podiatry and mental health clinics. Meeting the demand for audiology and eye care clinics has been a daunting challenge, with more veterans seeking care in those practice areas.

VISN 10 clinics have succeeded in minimizing waiting times; however, officials recognize there is much more work to accomplish. Conferences such as the Advanced Clinic Access Mini-Collaborative, held last October in Columbus, Ohio, help tackle the issue. Teams from clinics across the state attended this collaborative, and they now periodically



**VA staff members take part in the Advanced Clinic Access Mini-Collaborative.**

meet to discuss Advanced Clinic Access strategies. “These teams gather and share information on what has and hasn’t worked at each facility,” says Debbie Page, network communications manager for VA Healthcare System of Ohio. “From this, they generate ideas on what measures would be beneficial to implement at clinics across the state.”

### **Veterans benefit from enhanced services**

Advanced Clinic Access helps both VA patients and the clinic staff members, ensuring that VA anticipates and meets patient needs at the time of their visits. Other benefits include minimizing appointment cancellations; calling patients to reschedule a time that is best for them; developing service agreements between primary care and specialty care physicians to simplify the referral process; and making sure patients see their specific providers during each visit.

At VISN 10, eye clinics enroll patients before they are referred to save time at office visits. They also enlist volunteers to call patients and remind them of their appointments—a step that reduces no-shows and waiting times. Primary care clinics allow residents to control their own schedules, also producing timelier visits. **VH**

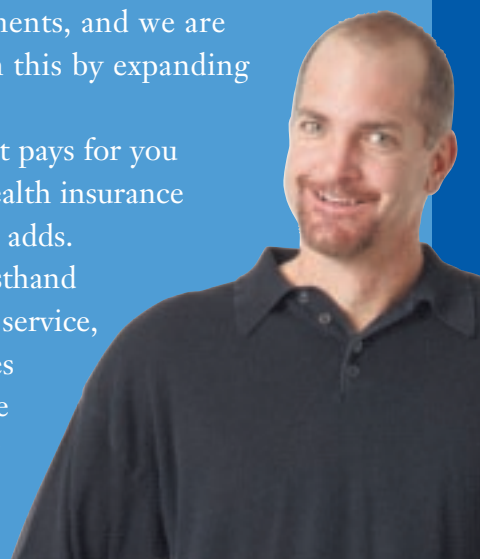
# Medical care cost recovery funds improve VA healthcare system

**D**o you know that you benefit by bringing your healthcare insurance information to your VA hospital when receiving treatment? Veterans have been doing so in increasing numbers and are seeing the rewards. *At no additional cost to you*, VA, after billing your insurance company, receives a 100 percent reimbursement, which it uses to enhance VA Healthcare System of Ohio healthcare services.

“The money from medical care cost recovery allows us to handle important issues like hiring our own specialists, increasing staffing, expanding services and buying state-of-the-art medical technology and equipment,” says Peggy Olm, the patient financial services officer at VA’s Dayton campus. “Also, we can apply the money we get back from veterans’ insurance companies to their co-payments.”

These medical care cost recovery funds are also used to build new clinics and improve existing ones. “As the population grows, so does the use of VA medical centers,” Olm says. “We are striving to provide quick access to appointments, and we are able to accomplish this by expanding our facilities.

“Simply put, it pays for you to bring in your health insurance information,” Olm adds. “You’ll see why firsthand with the quality of service, the types of services offered and the size and number of our facilities.” **VH**



# Reaching Us Is Easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

## MEDICAL CENTERS

### Brecksville VA Campus

10000 Brecksville Road  
Brecksville, OH 44141  
216-526-3030

### Chillicothe VA Campus

17273 State Route 104  
Chillicothe, OH 45601  
740-773-1141

### Cincinnati VA Campus

3200 Vine Street  
Cincinnati, OH 45220  
513-861-3100

### Dayton VA Campus

4100 West Third Street  
Dayton, OH 45428  
937-268-6511

### Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue  
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075  
859-572-6202

### Louis Stokes VA Campus

10701 East Boulevard  
Cleveland, OH 44106  
216-791-3800

## INDEPENDENT OUTPATIENT CLINIC

### Chalmers P. Wylie

#### VA Campus

543 Taylor Avenue  
Columbus, OH 43203  
614-257-5200

## COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS

### Akron VA Campus

676 South Broadway Street  
Suite 203  
Akron, OH 44311  
330-344-4177

### Athens VA Campus

510 West Union Street  
Athens, OH 45701  
740-593-7314

### Bellevue VA Campus

103 Landmark Drive  
Bellevue, KY 41073  
859-392-3840

### Canton VA Campus

221 3rd Street SE  
Canton, OH 44702  
330-489-4660

### Clermont County VA Campus

Eastgate Professional  
Office Park  
4355 Ferguson Drive, Suite 270  
Cincinnati, OH 45245  
513-943-3680

### Dearborn Co. VA Campus

710 W. Eads Parkway  
Lawrenceburg, IN 47025  
812-539-2313

### East Liverpool VA Campus

332 West 6th Street  
East Liverpool, OH 43920  
330-386-4303

### Grove City VA Campus

1953 Ohio Avenue  
Grove City, OH 43123  
614-257-5800

### Lancaster VA Campus

1550 Sheridan Drive, Suite 100  
Colonnade Medical Building  
Lancaster, OH 43130  
740-653-6145

### Lima VA Campus

1303 Bellefontaine Avenue  
Lima, OH 45804  
419-221-1893

### Lorain VA Campus

205 West 20th Street  
Lorain, OH 44052  
440-244-3833

### Mansfield VA Campus

1456 Park Avenue West  
Mansfield, OH 44906  
419-529-4602

### Marietta VA Campus

418 Colegate Drive  
Marietta, OH 45750  
740-568-0412

### McCafferty VA Campus

4242 Lorain Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44113  
216-939-0699

### Middletown VA Campus

675 North University Blvd.  
Middletown, OH 45042  
513-423-8387

### Painesville VA Campus

W 7 Jackson Street  
Painesville, OH 44077  
440-357-6740

### Portsmouth VA Campus

621 Broadway Street  
Portsmouth, OH 45662  
740-353-3236

### Richmond VA Campus

4351 South A Street  
Richmond, IN 47374  
765-973-6915

### Sandusky VA Campus

3416 Columbus Avenue  
Sandusky, OH 44870  
419-625-7350

### Springfield VA Campus

512 South Burnett Road  
Springfield, OH 45505  
937-328-3385

### Warren VA Campus

Riverside Square  
1400 Tod Avenue NW  
Warren, OH 44485  
330-392-0311

### Youngstown VA Campus

2031 Belmont Avenue  
Youngstown, OH 44505  
330-740-9200

### Zanesville VA Campus

840 Bethesda Drive  
Building 3A  
Zanesville, OH 43701  
740-453-7725

Call Tele-Nurse at 1-888-838-6446. • Visit us online at: [www.va.gov/visn10/](http://www.va.gov/visn10/)

VA Healthcare System of Ohio  
11500 Northlake Drive, Suite 200  
Cincinnati, OH 45249



PSRT STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
LEBANON JUNCTION, KY  
PERMIT NO. 19